



OREGON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

June 30, 2017

Dear Secretary of State Dennis Richardson,

In a press release that you sent yesterday, you repeatedly claimed that holding a special election is voter suppression. We were disturbed to see you inappropriately use that phrase multiple times. As the state's chief elections officer, you are assumed to know the dark and ugly history—and ongoing harms—of actual voter suppression in this country.

Since the founding of this country, people of color have been forcefully, intentionally, and often violently prevented from engaging in the core functions of democracy. In states around the nation, politicians are engaged in actual voter suppression tactics which means intentionally using legislation to prevent specific groups of people – usually people of color – from having equal access to the ballot.

Yesterday, you used this phrase to describe the setting of a Special Election date. Let's be clear, in a January election every voter will get a ballot. Thanks to Motor Voter, that means nearly every eligible voter will be able to participate in the election. Every voter will have an equal opportunity to cast a ballot. The public will have a chance to challenge the ballot title. This is not voter suppression; it's the opposite. Your comparison is, quite frankly, appalling. At best, you're ignorant of the history of real voter suppression and its impacts on our communities. At worst, you're trying to co-opt this painful history for your own partisan political purposes.

It is irresponsible and hurtful to manipulate the language of voter suppression for political purposes.

You've reached out to us multiple times this session to engage with you. Many of us were reluctant to engage, worried that we would be used for PR purposes, not actual engagement. Your press release yesterday confirmed many of our concerns.

Mr. Secretary, your voice comes with authority, and with your large email list, it is amplified. We expect far more from the chief elections officer of the state, especially one who has tried to paint himself as nonpartisan and has expressed a commitment to voter access.

We call on you to publicly retract your statement equating the timing of an election with voter suppression.

Sincerely,



OREGON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Senator Lew Frederick

Senator James Manning

Representative Teresa Alonso Leon

Representative Janelle Bynum

Representative Diego Hernandez

Representative Mark Meek

Representative Tawna Sanchez